

your trip so that essential personnel are able to get to the affected areas. We've got—we're moving assets—military assets, for example—trying to help people who need help, and if the highways are clogged, it's going to make it hard to get those assets into the affected areas.

Houston hospitals, for example, are in need of nurses. Nurses who are now trying to get back in are having problems getting on the highways. And so I would ask for those of you in the State to—who are in safe places now, not to hurry back to a city like Houston and let these highways flow the necessary goods and services to the people in deep east Texas who have been affected.

I know for a lot of folks in this State, it's miserable times. I hope you can take some comfort knowing there's a lot of people—like the people in this room—who are working overtime to save you and to help you, and that I think you'll be amazed by the extraordinary compassion of the people of Texas as they rise up to help their fellow citizens in need.

At any rates, it's good to see you all. Thank you for your hard work. May God bless those who have been affected, and may God bless those who are helping those who have been affected, and may God bless the country. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:12 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Rick Perry of Texas.

Remarks on Arrival in San Antonio, Texas

September 24, 2005

The President. Mr. Mayor, thanks—[in-audible]—and the Judge. It's good to see you all, thanks. It's good to be back in San Antonio.

The country and the world has seen the great compassion of the Texas people after Hurricane Katrina. Over 300,000 people moved east to west, and they found home here in Texas. And the city of San Antonio, Mr. Mayor, and Judge, was—really rose up with great compassion. And I cannot thank you enough and the people of this city enough, for providing safe haven for people whose lives were turned upside down by this

horrific storm. And it made me so proud to be from the State of Texas, to see the Texans rise to the occasion.

Again, I want to thank you, Mayor, and thank all the——

Mayor Hardberger. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. —houses of worship and community groups and individuals who love their neighbor like they'd like to be loved themselves.

We're now dealing with another storm, and the State of Texas is prepared for and is now responding to the storm that's affecting east Texas. I briefed today up in Colorado about the Federal Government's response to the storm and then went to Austin to be briefed by the State officials, to make sure that we're working in concert with the State. And then tomorrow morning General Clark is going to come over and brief me once again about how the Federal Government is helping the State of Texas and Louisiana recover.

But at any rate, it's good to be back here. I'm proud of my fellow Texans, and I'm proud of the people of the San Antonio.

Mayor Hardberger. Well, we're mighty glad to have you here, Mr. President. Thank you for being with us.

The President. Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:26 p.m. at Randolph Air Force Base. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Phil Hardberger of San Antonio, TX; Bexar County Judge Nelson W. Wolff; and Lt. Gen. Robert T. Clark, USA, commander, Joint Task Force—Rita.

Remarks During a Briefing on Hurricane Rita in San Antonio

September 25, 2005

The President. Yes, having said that about Katrina, there were still some amazingly heroic efforts in pulling people off roofs. I don't know how many sorties were flown in Katrina, but there must have been thousands of sorties.

Maj. Gen. White. Well, as I left last Wednesday, it was close to 18,000 sorties

flown. Now, sir, that includes every agency, and it's a lot of the airlift in there too.

The President. Your point is, on a Katrina, had there been a better coordinated effort between Guard choppers—Coast Guard choppers, regular Army choppers, it would have been less dangerous?

Maj. Gen. White. It would have been a better orchestrated plan. You wouldn't have seen a lot of—for instance, one of the things that we've learned out of that—we had someone that needed to be rescued, and that comes up on the net. Five helicopters show up at the same place to get one person. That's the sort of simplistic thing we'd like to avoid, and we're not maximizing the use of our forces to best efficiency.

Certainly, that was a train wreck that we saw in New Orleans, and I know everybody is jumping in, trying to help at one time, and that's the right thing to do. But if we can have a national plan that would address the search and rescue at this magnitude, is what we're out to try to do.

Maj. Gen. Mayes. Sir, if I might add, I would say that it wouldn't necessarily make it less dangerous. I would tell you the professionalism and the plan came together. I believe that all participants would agree that with the fog that we had and the weather that we were battling, nighttime, all the things that went into that environment, that I'm not sure we can make it less dangerous. There may be a factor there, but the main point would be, with a national plan, we'll have a quicker jump-start and an opportunity to save more people. That would be my input there.

Lt. Gen. Clark. A national plan, good training against the plan, gets you to this state faster in extremis. And that's the goal.

The President. Part of the reason I've come down here and part of the reason I went to NORTHCOM, was to better understand how the Federal Government can plan and surge equipment, to mitigate natural disasters. And I appreciate very much, General, your briefing, because it's precisely the kind of information that I'll take back to Washington to help all of us understand how we can do a better job in coordinating Federal, State, and local response.

The other question, of course, I asked was, is there a circumstance in which the Department of Defense becomes the lead agency? Clearly, in the case of a terrorist attack, that would be the case, but is there a natural disaster which—of a certain size that would then enable the Defense Department to become the lead agency in coordinating and leading the response effort. That's going to be a very important consideration for Congress to think about.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:30 a.m. in the headquarters of the Air Education and Training Command at Randolph Air Force Base. Participating in the briefing were Maj. Gen. John White, USAF, member, Maj. Gen. M. Scott Mayes, USAF, member, and Lt. Gen. Robert T. Clark, USA, commander, Joint Task Force—Rita. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Remarks at the Federal Emergency Management Agency Joint Field Office in Baton Rouge, Louisiana

September 25, 2005

The President. Thank you all. The Governor and I just got briefed by Admiral Allen on the progress here in Louisiana. There's still assessment on the damage of Hurricane Rita. One of the things that is important for the citizens of this State to do is to listen to the Governor about when it is okay to return back to your homes. I know a lot of people want to get back home. It's important that there be an orderly process. It's important there be an assessment done of infrastructure. And it's important for the people of the affected areas of Louisiana to listen carefully to the Governor and local authorities about the proper timing of return home.

We also got briefed on the levees in New Orleans. There is flooding, obviously, in the 9th ward. The Corps of Engineers gave us a briefing about the building—repairing levees and then, once again, pumping the water out of that part of New Orleans. It's—I would say it's an optimistic appraisal, in the sense that work has started now, and they can start to—draining that part of the city again.